

# How not to do email marketing

My inbox is under attack. In just the last couple of days, I have received no less than 15 emails from either the same sender or with the same subject line.



## A barrage of junk

The first one came in on Sunday at 3 a.m. from “Emma Thompson” with the subject line “New customers looking for your services.” When I opened it, it said someone was seeking PR services. I deleted the email because I thought no serious agency would be sending out emails on Sunday at 3 a.m.

Later that morning, I got an email from “Kate Potter” with the subject line “Web designer quote.”

And then an email from “Mia West” with the subject line “New customers looking for your services.”

And then at least ten more emails throughout President’s Day from “Kate Potter” with alternating subject lines:

“Mobile Software Developer Quote”

“Photographer Quote”

“Packaging Designer Quote”

“Web Designer Quote”

Interspersed were two more emails from “Mia West,” subject: “New customer looking for your services.”

Notice a pattern? Same sender and/or same subject line.

### **This is lead generation?**

I opened some of these email and found they all came from a supposed lead generation outfit called Bark(dot)com. This “company” found my website and copied my contact information into their database, and then began “contacting” me.

Perhaps Bark(dot)com is a legitimate business, but it doesn’t act like it. In fact, it is acting in a downright shady manner. Its marketing “method” is more like a spammer’s than that of a legitimate business’ email marketing technique.

### **If it acts like spam...**

What makes these emails look and act like spam, and therefore be wholly ineffective:

- Sending during non-business hours and days
- Sending the same email time after time
- Sending way too many emails in too short a time span
- Sending emails that are not relevant and not personalized

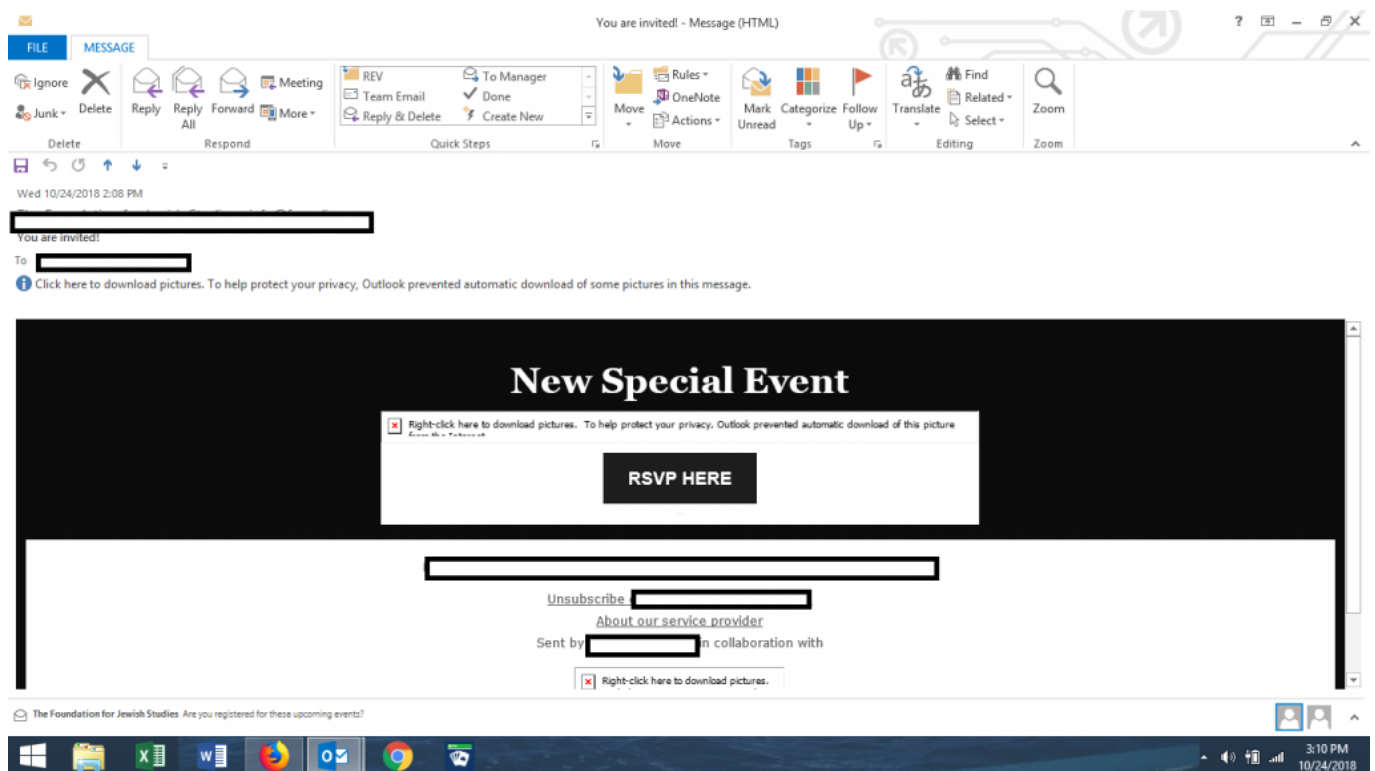
### **Update**

Since writing this post, I received six more emails, making it over 20 emails in a 48-hour time period.

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# The biggest email marketing mistake

I've lost count of the times I've gotten an email that looks like this:



If you are getting poor response to your email marketing, emails that look like the above could be the reason.

As you can see, this email is mostly images. There's very little text, and the text doesn't give me any relevant information. The important information about the event I am being asked to RSVP to is embedded in an image. If I wanted to know more (date, venue, type of event, all the *relevant* information) so that I know whether I want to click on the RSVP button, I'd have to download the images. This is an extra, and unnecessary, step that places the burden on me.

**Don't send all image texts. Ever. That is the biggest email marketing mistake I see done time and again.**

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## **Legit or spam?**

Not a week goes by that I don't get several unsolicited emails from people/businesses who think I need financing, or a direct marketing list, or help with my website, or (just got this today) think I may want voice over talent (!). Almost all these emails are personalized to me, or at least to my website (as in "Dear Deborahbrody.com"). Some get my name from my website (presumably after doing a search) and some from LinkedIn. Others, I don't have the foggiest idea of where or how they found me (or even why they are contacting me). Very few seem to know much about my business, and none are companies I have done business with in the past. In short, lots of businesses reach out via email to try to drum up sales or generate cash.

**Is it legit, is it spam, or is it a scam?**

But how many of these are legit, and how many are scammers/spammers? Where do we draw the line between an honest attempt to generate a lead based on internet research, and spam? There are probably a few indicators of spam/scams:

1) Using the same pitch over and over and over, sometimes from different names within the "company." In other words, more than one inquiry.

2) Adding, without permission, your name to an email marketing list, and putting the onus on you to unsubscribe (this is a

direct violation of the CAN-SPAM rules and can/should be reported as such).

3) A sketchy sounding proposition (financing with no credit check, for example).

### **Is this company a legit spammer?**

For the past several weeks, I have been getting emails from something called Imparture about social media marketing classes in Washington, DC. I was getting about three emails a week, every week. They all had the unsubscribe feature, and finally, this week, I unsubscribed (not that I had subscribed in the first place). Then yesterday, I got a personalized email from "Elliot.: Here it is:

*Hi Deborah,*

*Did you get a chance to consider my last email?*

*Check out our upcoming Google Analytics training course taking place in Washington DC.*

*There are only a few spots left so sign up if you are interested.*

*All the best,*

**Elliot Jay**

*Client Relationship Manager*

**Imparture**

*London / New York / San Francisco*

Now, I don't know Elliot, and as I said, I had already unsubscribed from these emails. I wrote him and told him I would be reporting him for spam. Then, today, I got this email from "Noah":

*Hi Deborah,*

*I came across your profile and saw that your skill set contains Social Media Marketing, and wanted to reach out with an opportunity.*

*We have only a few spots remaining in our upcoming Social Media Marketing Immersive course in Washington DC.*

*This course will give you an advanced level of understanding regarding Social Media Marketing, and add significant value to your skillset – might this be something of interest?*

*You can find out more about the course, as well as sign up, [here](#).*

*Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.*

*All the best,*

**Noah Kelsey**

*Client Relationship Manager*

**Imparture**

*London / New York / San Francisco*

I looked up Imparture and the company does have a website, a LinkedIn profile, and even a Twitter account (with only 500 or so followers), which look legit enough. On the other hand, I did find a review stating that the company had scheduled a class, cancelled it, and didn't issue refunds (sketchy!).

This company may indeed be legitimate (albeit with questionable customer service), but its marketing practices are definitely spammy. As I said before, *I have never signed up for a class or to get these emails*. And I have "unsubscribed" and have since gotten two more emails. Any legitimate marketing effort would ask for permission to add you to a list, and would respect an unsubscribe request. This

company has failed on both ends. It added me to an email list without my express consent (and again, I am not sure where/how they got my email address), and it has ignored my unsubscribe request, twice so far.

### **Do not be a spammer!**

If you are a legitimate business, do not follow the scammer's playbook. Sending unsolicited mail is against CAN-SPAM rules. Want to learn more? Check out the FTC's [CAN-SPAM Act: A compliance guide for business](#).

Have you had a similar experience? What is your take on the legit versus spam discussion?

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## **2 big digital marketing mistakes with easy fixes**

It happened at least twice this week (and it's only Thursday of a short work week): I came across two different digital marketing mistakes. One involves email marketing and the other involves content marketing. And I see different organizations making the same mistakes every single week.

These two digital marketing mistakes are common, and yet easily fixable. Take the time to make these fixes today, and I can promise you almost instant results.

### **Big digital marketing mistake #1: Sending an all-image/graphics email**

Even though email marketing is one of the oldest and most useful forms of digital marketing, there are still lots of organizations that make the mistake of sending out emails that

are completely image/graphics-based. I just got one last night. It was made up of several images that provided information about promotions at different locations. And I couldn't see any of the information.

The big problem with these emails is that in most email clients (Outlook, Gmail, etc.) you have to download images in order to see them. So, if your email is made up exclusively of images, your recipients will not see anything unless they specifically click on "download images." And unless your email subject line is extremely compelling and/or descriptive, your recipients may not take that extra step, and your email marketing campaign will be a waste.

**Easy fix:** Use images in email sparingly, and make sure the important information (i.e., dates, costs, location, etc.) is *text-based*.

## **Big digital marketing mistake #2: Not having a sharing mechanism on your content**

Just this week, a lawyer I know shared a link to a blog post his firm created regarding GDPR (the new European data regulation that went into effect on May 25). I checked it out, and thought it would be useful to my network, but when I went to share it, I found that there were no sharing buttons of any type. In 2018, more than ten years into Facebook and Twitter, and 15 years into LinkedIn, there is simply no excuse for not having sharing buttons. Sharing buttons allow your readers to easily share your content to their preferred social media network (mine are at the very bottom of this post if you'd like to share this content).

Social sharing is key to content marketing because it amplifies the reach of your blog post or article or microsite.

**Easy fix:** Add sharing buttons to your blog and to any other page on your website that a reader may want to share (for example, your contact page). There are many different plug-ins

available to do this work for you (ShareThis, AddThis, etc.). You can also read Hubspots's useful cheat sheet: [How to Create Social Media Buttons for All the Top Social Networks](#). Or simply search "social sharing buttons."

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Have you seen these digital marketing mistakes? Are you making these digital marketing mistakes? I am interested in your experiences. Please comment to let me know.

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## **You do know you can segment your mailing list, right?**

Today, I got an email about a six-week communications leadership seminar. It sounds interesting, except it takes place in Chicago and I live near Washington, D.C. The target audience for this seminar is business professionals who live in the greater Chicago area yet this email was probably sent to the whole list.

Email marketing is great because it is relatively inexpensive, and because it is highly customizable. Say you are a retailer with stores across the country. You could send emails to your customers in specific locations announcing the opening of a new store or a change in hours, or perhaps a change in location.

**In other words, with email marketing you can send targeted email messages that are relevant to their recipients at a relatively low cost.**

Yet the email I received about the Chicago seminar is not relevant. It is just clutter in my inbox. Why did I get this email? I'd venture to say it is because the list owner did not either a) segment the list, or b) gather enough information from the recipients to allow for segmentation, or c) both.

Most email marketing programs allow for list segmentation. If you are marketing to a diverse audience, you will have to gather some relevant information to be able to segment your list or to be able to personalize it. If you don't gather information that will allow segmentation and/or you have an email provider that doesn't allow for segmentation, you need to make some changes ASAP. That is, unless you are trying to get your email deleted or generate a few unsubscribes.

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## **How to run your organization into oblivion**

About a decade ago, I was on the board of a small nonprofit that provided educational programming. I lasted all of a few months since I was fighting a losing battle with the other board members and a spectacularly uninformed (and very young) executive director.

This nonprofit had very little money but insisted on a color brochure printed on heavy paper, listing their courses. The ED would then mail it first class (read, the expensive way) because it would take too long to prepare it for the cheaper, bulk/nonprofit rate.

Among the things I suggested was to print the brochure on cheaper paper (like newsprint), use the bulk rate, and to consider going all electronic instead. All these ideas were

dismissed. One board member thought it was crucial to print the brochure on good paper because it made it seem more serious (?). The ED was balking at using the bulk rate because it meant pre-sorting the brochure. And another board member said that many people wanted the printed brochure and would never abide an electronic format.

Like I said, it was a losing battle and I believe that there's no sense in discussing change with people who don't want to change.

Here we are a good ten years later, and I just got their latest brochure. Yes, I am still on the mailing list even though I have not signed up for a class or donated any money or shown any interest whatsoever. It is still printed on heavy paper, and has full color (which adds to the expense). They are now using the nonprofit/bulk rate. When you use the bulk rate, you have to be aware that delivery will take longer than using first class postage. Apparently, it is not something that this nonprofit understands. I got the brochure yesterday (May 10). The front cover has a banner telling me spring classes begin on April 26, 2017.

This nonprofit continues to print an expensive brochure. However, it doesn't print it out with enough lead time to be able to overcome the slower bulk delivery rate. In effect, this is a complete waste. If you are using a brochure as your only means to communicate your offering, then it better be timely.

And, it seems this organization does not review its database. It continues sending out brochures to people that have not indicated any interest in years. Of course, this adds to the cost of the printing and mailing.

Can you imagine if they had provided this brochure electronically? They would be able to send it out at precisely the right time. They would be able to gauge interest from the

open and click rates. They would be able to scrub their lists of any bad addresses. They would increase their reach through the ability to share online. But why change?

**Here's how you run your organization to the ground: you waste your precious resources and keep doing it until you have nothing left. You keep doing things the way you always have even though it has never been cost-effective. You don't adapt.**

Sigh.

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## **5 Email Marketing Mistakes You Need To Fix Right Now**

Email marketing is still an incredibly effective marketing tool, *if* you are doing it correctly. Sadly, that's a big if. Often, marketers make the following five mistakes. Are you?

Here are five email marketing mistakes that may be affecting your campaign's performance.

### **1. Not getting permission**

Are you sending out your email marketing that haven't signed up for it? Then not only are you making a crucial mistake, you

are also running afoul of the CAN-SPAM law. This is huge mistake that you must stop right away.

## **2. Sending image-only emails**

Did you know that Outlook and many other email programs do not show images until the user authorizes their download? This means that if your email is all images, and no plain text, your recipients will not see anything except a bunch of red xes. Don't make your recipients work so hard! Send both text and images.

## **3. Sending too frequently or too many emails**

When people sign up for your email marketing, they are indicating interest in getting information from you. However, they are not indicating they want their email box to be flooded with your stuff. And yet, some marketers feel that reach is not enough to cut through the clutter, and frequency is needed. Excessive frequency will not cut through the clutter, instead it may get you cut off entirely.

## **4. Not checking your analytics**

How many people open your emails? How many click on links? How many bounces are you getting? If you don't know the answers to these questions, you aren't checking your analytics. You are missing out on valuable information that can help guide your future email marketing efforts.

## **5. Not cleaning up your list**

Periodically, you should go through your list. You should pay special attention to recipients that are not opening your email. If they've been on your list for a long time, keeping them on does not improve your email marketing. You could try sending them an email asking them if they wish to remain on

your list or whether there is information that they need from you and aren't getting. If you get no response, then delete them from your list. Getting rid of these users will actually help increase your open rate.

How many of these email marketing mistakes are you committing? Which mistakes would you add?

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## Use email, don't abuse it

If you're like me, you've been bombarded by email for the past several days. First, it was all about Black Friday deals. Then it was the Cyber Monday deals. And today, it's about Giving Tuesday.

Now, I am not against getting deals or giving to good causes. And I think using email marketing is very effective given that people generally opt-in, and are willing to receive your stuff.

**But I am against email marketing *abuse*.**

Because it's an absolute abuse of your list to send too many emails in too short a time span. It overwhelms people.

*@DBMC my inbox is vomiting. It's bad*

*– Jan-Michael Sacharko (@JanMichaelDC) November 29, 2016*

Enough said.

The bottom line with abusing your email marketing privileges

is that it will be counterproductive. Too much email (especially from the same sender) makes people hit delete. And some may even unsubscribe.

Use email wisely. Don't abuse it or your list's good faith.

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## **Always start with the reader in mind**



Photo by [Kaboompics.com](https://www.kaboompics.com)

It seems obvious that you should always write your marketing and communications materials with your readers in mind. After all, if you are trying to communicate with them, you have to

understand what they need to know.

And yet, how many times have you received a letter that doesn't say anything? Or an email that lacks crucial information? How many times have you had to call up a company because you didn't understand something it sent you? I bet you've had many a moment like this, which left you frustrated.

### **Missing information**

I had such a moment last week. I had signed up for an editing workshop from the American Copy Editors Society (ACES) being given on November 5 in Washington, DC. Here's the email I received a few days before the event (note that I blocked out the names of presenters and a phone number for privacy):

This message is to confirm that you are registered for the American Copy Editors Society (ACES) Boot Camp from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. this Saturday, Nov. 5, at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. The workshop will take place in the Fungler Hall auditorium, room 103, located on the Foggy Bottom campus.

Lunch will be provided by the local chapter of ACES.

Presenters XX, XX and XX look forward to welcoming you on Saturday.

If you have any questions or find yourself lost on Nov. 5, please feel free to call 571-xxx-xxxx for assistance.

Notice anything missing from this email? How about the address for the building? Or how about directions and parking information (or links to those)? How about an agenda and/or schedule for the day? Is there any information about what you need to bring with you?

### **Trying again**

The next day, ACES sent another email, regarding parking information. It is basically the same email as before, except for the addition of parking and Metro information, which I

bolded for you to see more clearly.

We look forward to seeing you at the American Copy Editors Society (ACES) Boot Camp from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. tomorrow at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. The workshop will take place in the Fonger Hall auditorium, room 103, located on the Foggy Bottom campus.

Lunch will be provided by the local chapter of ACES.

### **Parking**

**The closest garage to Fonger Hall is the University Parking Garage/G Street Garage, located at 2028 G Street, NW Washington, DC 20052. There is access from both 20th Street and 21st Street between F and G Streets. The self-service garage is open 24/7, accepting MasterCard, Visa and American Express for payments (no cash). The full day rate is \$12.**

**The closest Metro stop is Foggy Bottom-GWU, with service on the Blue, Orange and Silver lines.**

If you find yourself lost on Nov. 5, please feel free to call 571-XXX-XXXX for assistance.

This attempt was a better than the prior email, but still, no address for Fonger Hall. It's as if ACES thinks that everyone is intimately familiar with GW's Foggy Bottom Campus. For those of you who aren't in the DC area, GW's campus is a city campus. Buildings have street addresses—they are not in quads as in traditional colleges.

I looked up Fonger Hall on Google, but I forgot to note the address, and when I got to the parking garage on Saturday, I didn't know where to go. I looked it up on my phone and the address I got did not correspond to the building. I called the number on the email, but there was no response. I was able to get directions from a student I saw on the street, and I then got to the workshop several minutes late.

**How helpful are you being to your reader?**

If ACES had started with the reader's needs in mind when writing this email, it would have realized that providing an address and links to maps and directions would have helped recipients of this email.

### **It's about the 5 Ws**

When you write a press release, you should think like a journalist and answer the five Ws: what, why, where, who and when. You should also answer the how. This advice is also applicable to most any communications material you create.

**If you need help creating effective communications materials, contact me!**

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# **How to undermine your credibility**

## **An important message for Deborah**

That was the exact subject line of an email I got this morning from AT&T.

Since I have my cell phone service through AT&T, and the email clearly was *designed* to sound official, and I thought it was service-related news about my usage or bill. But no, it wasn't about my cell phone service at all. Instead, the email was an advertisement for a "flash sale" on AT&T's home security services.

Let's review: A company with which I have an established (and may I add, quite long) customer relationship sends me an email that claims it's important. The subject line is personalized, but the purpose of the email is to sell me other, *unrelated*

services.

### **A case of misdirection**

In other words, the subject line of this email was misleading. The email was neither important nor specifically for me. It was a promotion that required a subject line that would hook me into opening it.

### **Entering the realm of unintended consequences**

Today's misleading email from AT&T had two unintended consequences:

- it eroded my trust in AT&T, undermining the company's credibility
- it caused me to unsubscribe from their promotional emails (all of them)

### **Raise interest but not at the expense of your credibility**

Yes, companies and organizations need to have email subject lines that will raise interest and make people open the email. That's the purpose of email marketing after all. But when the subject lines are misleading—designed specifically as click-bait—the organization's credibility takes a hit. No longer will readers believe emails with words such as important, or urgent. Down the road, this can have negative consequences.

### **Bottom line**

Cultivate your credibility, even at the expense of potential sales. Once you've destroyed your credibility, you will have a very hard time getting it back.